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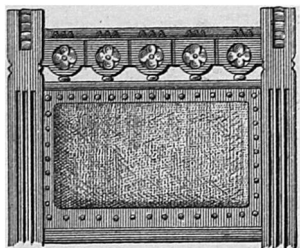
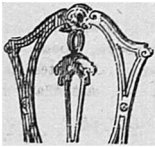
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ODDS AND ENDS.

WITH PEN AND PENCIL.

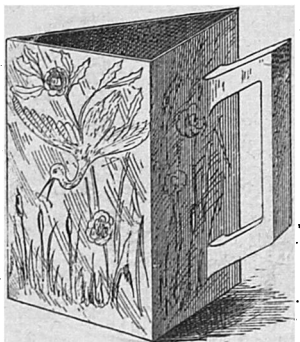
Mr. J. C. Nicoll, hitherto known as an etcher and marine painter, has recently devoted attention to floral designs, with a view to their application to stained glass windows. Window decoration should be treated either in a rigidly conventional manner, or should exhibit the freest possible forms, and Mr. Nicoll has chosen free and natural outlines. A branch of dogwood, growing diagonally upward from left to right, its large white blossoms and green shoots relieved against a ruddy brown background, readily suggests its usefulness as a decorative device. The fact that artists like Vedder, de Forrest, Anderson, Tiffany and Yewell have given most of their time and thought of late to decoration, abandoning pictorial work, except such as suffices to represent them in the Academy, accounts in part for the great improvement observed in domestic interiors and in the decoration of halls, theatres and churches.

One of the characteristic features of modern decoration, and one of its healthiest and most approvable features, is the directness, simplicity and purpose that is commonly exhibited and which is in decided contrast to the turgidity and buncombe of what may be termed the inartistic period of our development—the period of hoop skirts in dress, and of knobby carvings in furniture. Decorative lines that go straight to the mark, and seem to be guided by resolute design, are more agreeable to the eye, and satisfy the esthetic sense more adequately than the “stuck-on” ornaments and weakly-rounded lines of the furniture of a past generation. Compare, for instance, a couple of coffee-cups, and note how much simpler and neater is the straight-sided one than the one of bulbous outline. One is from a Broadway restaurant, the other from a Fulton Market cake and coffee stand. The one is agreeable to look at and to handle, because there is no indication of waste. Economy in form is not alone compatible with, but essential to, satisfying work. Here, too, are contrasting details of a chair, in which a sort of Italian floridity appears conventional and commonplace beside the reserve and simple elegance suggested in the modern specimen. In the other the lines are straight or are subservient to fundamental lines which are so. This simplicity is extended to draperies with good effect, for when it was once customary to loop curtains, portieres and the like so that they hung in large curves and ponderous folds, it is now more common to let them hang unobstructed and make their own folds, which are long, narrow, straight and impart a sense of fixity and naturalness that is not conveyed by the balloon-like curves of draperies.



Mr. George R. Blanchard, vice-president of the Erie road, is an accomplished dinner-giver, and to gastronomic knowledge he unites a lucky *penchant* for old china and artistic oddities. A set of old “apostle” spoons, and a full dinner service of old blue and white Delft, each dish and plate bearing a different picture, together with a rich harlequin dinner set in gold and colors on creamy porcelain, are among his recent acquisitions. A Shakspearean dinner service, that has just been ordered, is an invention of his own. Each plate and dish is unique, and bears upon it a quotation from the plays or poems of Shakspeare, serious or witty, as the case demands. In some instances a punster’s liberty has been taken, as in the case of a salad dish, whereon is inscribed “Fond memories of the isle” (oil.)

Speaking of dishes, I want to give a very cheap little hint to those amiable philistines who continue to eat their dinners from thick, undecorated white china, and whose tables are as devoid of cheerfulness, originality and color as a man in a swallow-tail coat at a formal reception. Pardon the strain of the analogy. All that I wished to say was that you should thank me for advising you to drop in at some one of the knick-knack shops on West 14th street and buy a Chinese cream jug to offset in a slight degree the monotony of your tables. They cost less than a “quarter,” if my memory serves me rightly, but are as “cute” and dainty little trifles as you can obtain for that amount or anything near it. Notice the odd originality of the design. The “ground plan,” you perceive, is a triangle, and as the thing is made of what passes among us for a kind of heavy Satsuma ware, with characteristic Chinese decoration, it is quite a pretty little addition to the table. A few such matters dress the humblest board and give it a cheerful sparkle. Even a day laborer can afford one of these



bits of pottery. And he can afford a pictured tile for his coffee-pot to stand upon—it will save his tablecloth, too—and he can make his tea in a Chinese or Japanese pot that costs no more than the ugly vessel in common use for that purpose; and if he has a few other bits of colored earthenware or china—majolica is much better than nothing—with a sprig of leaves and blossoms from the window plants, set in a vase or glass of water in the centre of his table, I would like to know what more he could need if he were a millionaire. And would not some millionaires envy him his appetite and the presence of such a rosy family about him at his breakfast?

Clocks. Have we got ahead of our grandfather in respect to their time-pieces? The clock’s face is usually an utterly vacant countenance. Many a window and inanimate wall has more expression, and makers of clock cases seem strangely inapt at giving it character and animation. It is made to simulate the wheel of a Roman chariot, with bronze figures driving the bronze horses it is fastened to. It is dressed up with malachite and silver and flanked with vases and candelabra. It intones the hours in the mellowest and most distant of “cathedral chimes.” Yet, somehow, it is the one thing in a modern room that is bound to appear conventional and ill-fitting. This is because clock-makers try to conceal or disguise the fact that it is a clock; but bless you! it won’t submit to being disguised. No! Let the family clock assert itself, and let it be worthy of its situation and environment. Those sturdy old clocks that you still find in the houses of New England farmers and Nantucket sea-captains—faces like the full moon, weights that wound up with a rattle like a ship’s capstan, rosewood and mahogany cases as high as your head and as shiny as porcelain, bright brass hinges, a bell emulous of the town clock, and a picture in primary colors on the glass front—there are many things about those old veterans that challenge our respect. The tall family clock, with its honest, work-a-day old face unwrinkled by years of service, looks better in our rooms than most of the French and American oddities of recent date. It is a relic of Puritan simplicity, and in its severe uprightness it carries a suggestion of moral reliability and self-poise. Let us restore it.

In the days when it was customary to make wall paper pictorially descriptive of Chinese architecture and landscape, to use bulbous furniture, to place mirrors and pictures in tame oval frames, and to balance a lace curtain hung over one half of a window with an opaque red curtain over the other half, it was also customary to put dresses upon chairs, sofas, ottomans, and nearly every thing else that would submit to such treatment. Chintz ulsters concealed the materials, and even the form of chairs, the carpet was hidden by rolls of crash, the piano legs were in pantalets, the picture frames and chandeliers were swathed in netting, and the very curtain tassels were tied in bags of tarlatan. Things naturally had a cheap and cloudy look in a room thus furnished, and *noli me tangere* seemed embroidered into every sheet and bag and cover. There might be something under all this dusty and faded coating and carpeting that was worth seeing, but you were not in a position to swear it, or to attest the veracity of the Pinaforic axiom, “Things are seldom what they seem.” This practice of hiding furniture from view is not entirely defunct, though it is earnestly hoped that it soon will be, for one of the primary essentials of modern decoration is openness and honesty. Veneers and shams are out of date, and upholstery and hangings are made to do service instead of being concealed beneath common-looking cloths. Better to re-bind a book when its cover is worn than never permit it to be handled. Better have a chair upholstered anew than to keep what beauty it has from sight. In some houses furniture coverings are never taken off. When “company” is present, they are retained lest the furniture be soiled, and when there is no company, there is no need of displaying the treasures of the establishment. Thus reasoned the Arkansas farmer when asked why he did not mend his leaky roof: “Cause I don’t want to go up there and work in the rain,” he replied.

“But why don’t you mend it in dry weather?”

“Cause then it don’t leak.”

Concealment is but a form of sham. Better the simplicity of a cottage than that invisible but presumptive splendor where the visitor is impressed with an idea that the people of the house have come into possession of costlier things than they dare to use, or that they are influenced by a petty spirit of economy that should suggest furnishing and decorating on a lower scale of cost and beauty.

Mexico in so many respects resembles Spain, its vegetation is so brilliant, its church architecture and color are so picturesque, its people so affect brightness in their costumes, that it would seem as if we might obtain from them some useful hints on decoration, but Thomas Moran, the painter, who has just returned from there, says that the country offers practically no hints of value in this direction. The houses are grossly bare, and while church interiors are full of color, there is little attempt at tone or harmony of tint. Our church builders, however, might study their tiled domes

and ornate campaniles, and potters might find something worth copying in their bizarre figures and vessels of bright-colored clay. Mr. Moran’s studies and sketches, which form a port-folio of rare interest, and will soon be placed on public exhibition, suggest that in the tropical vegetation our decorators might find themes. The Egyptians utilized the lotus and papyrus in their architecture, and Latrobe made a very acceptable capital for a column out of corn stalks, leaves and ears, and here is the banana, the palm, the agave, the Spanish bayonet, the fence cactus, the round-leaved cactus and the melon cactus, for designers to work upon. What a frieze could be made with the lemon yellow and luscious crimson flowers of the pin-cushion cactus! Conventionalized in form, but unaltered in color—if, indeed, their color could be faithfully reproduced—they would transcend in beauty and richness any of the conventionalized flower forms in common use. Let the next artist who crosses the plains in July secure a few of the cactus flowers and see what he can do with them.

Much has been said about floor coverings. To be, or



not to be covered, is the question, but how there can be any question about the matter, when such patterns of carpeting as the above are considered, I do not understand. A thousand times better the bare wood than such abominable conglomerations of geometry, architecture, herbage and vegetables. This design was recently patented by a large manufacturer, and when I asked a prominent carpet man why such things were tolerated by the “trade,” he quoted the old law of demand and supply—“People want such things, and we must have them.” If such people could only be reached, and taught that they must also demand the addition of a few whales, horses, lions, jumbos, etc., I wonder if the “trade” wouldn’t induce Barnum to empty his great “Educational Hippodrome” into the design. In considering the prevalence of such a “taste” one is reminded of the old fashioned hearth rugs emblazoned with a lion standing over his prey with the gore dripping from his jaws, or making for a jungle with it.